

Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church
724 Camp Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1111

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

SAINT PATRICK'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Street Address: 724 Camp Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish,
Louisiana.

Present Owner: Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Present Occupant: Parish of Saint Patrick's.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Brief Statement of Significance: Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church was the sanctuary erected in 1838 in the section of New Orleans known as the Faubourg Sainte Marie. This parish, established in 1833, was the second parish established in New Orleans, and the church was built to accommodate the rapidly increasing Irish population that flooded the city in this period. The Gothic Revival church has been an architectural landmark in the city for over a century, and a great number of important and influential local church dignitaries, such as Bishop Antoine Blanc, have played major roles in its development.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The following chronology of Saint Patrick's, based on parish records, has been extracted from a history of the church by Samuel Wilson, Jr., FAIA, that was included in St. Patrick's of New Orleans, 1833-1958 (pp. 41-54). This paper-bound volume, a collection of essays published to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the parish, was edited by Charles L. Dufour and published by Saint Patrick's Parish in 1958.

- A site on Camp Street between Girod and Julia Streets was purchased by the Trustees on January 15, 1833, from W. W. Caldwell.
- In April 1833 a small wooden frame structure was completed by the firm of Sidle and Stewart. On the 21st of that month the church was formally dedicated by Bishop Leo deNechere.
- Dakin (Charles Bingley) & Dakin (James Harrison) was selected to design a new church, which was to replace the frame structure which was already inadequate by 1837. One drawing made in 1837 survives: a longitudinal section, now in the Louisiana State Museum (photocopy made (October 1964) for HABS and included in this photo-data book). It is of a Gothic design.

-On July 6, 1838, Dakin & Dakin signed a contract "to build, erect, and finish . . . a building . . . in the most faithful superior workmanlike manner," before the notary, H. B. Cenas. The price agreed upon was \$115,000. Attached to the contract (dated May 12, 1838) is a set of printed specifications - an unusual thing at that date. These specifications begin:

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" . . . General Description. The style of architecture exhibited in the composition of the design for the exterior is that of the Pointed Style of the Second Period of Ecclesiastical Architecture and had been principally imitated from that unrivalled example of splendor and majesty, York Minster Cathedral.

Windows. The windows are in the florid Gothic style of the third period, which display more elegance in their tracery than earlier examples.

Ceiling. The ceiling of the interior is in imitation of the ceiling of Exeter Cathedral, which is also another gorgeous example of the second period. The slips and galleries are in the richest florid style of the third period, and display the most chastened elegance of the art.

Altar and Tabernacle. The Altar and Tabernacle are composed in the style of the second and third period, and in richness, elegance and variety, they possess all that the art is susceptible of."

These specifications also indicate a tower that was to be 185 feet high, a nave 58 feet in height, and a vestibule 40 feet in height.

Gibson's City Directory for 1838 gives additional information about the original design:

"St. Patrick's Church, Camp Street. The designs of this sacred temple contemplate a triumph worthy of the genius of Gothic architecture, whether the dimensions or the splendor of the structure be considered.

"The plan will be 93 feet by 164 feet on the ground, and from the sidewalk to the summit of the tower 190 feet. The style of architecture has been taken from the famed York Minster Cathedral, and if executed agreeably to the designs of Messrs. Dakin & Dakin, which have been adopted by the Trustees of the Church, it will far surpass every attempt at Gothic architecture on this side of the Atlantic, and may proudly challenge comparison with any parochial edifice in Europe. It is intended that its erection shall commence immediately. The cost will be about \$100,000."

-The cornerstone was laid on July 1, 1838, by Bishop Blanc.

- On October 1, 1839, the trustees signed a new contract with James Gallier, Sr. (1798-1868) for \$1,000. He was to make all designs necessary to complete the church, and was to direct construction for an additional 5% of the cost. The reason for this change is not too clear, although Gallier in his autobiography states that there had been a disagreement "between Dakin and the managers."
- Under the Dakins the building progressed "nearly to the roof"; however, shortly after James Gallier, Sr., succeeded to the work, a defective tower foundation forced extensive repairs.
- A number of major changes in the design were made either by Gallier at this time or previously by Dakin subsequent to the original drawings. Dakin's original "sectional drawing shows the roof vaulting spanning from wall to wall without side aisle columns."
- Drawings for Saint Patrick's made in Gallier's office (1839 - c. 1842):
 - a) Camp Street Elevation (now in the Louisiana State Museum, Jackson Square, New Orleans, Louisiana)
 - b) Detail of the Main Entry (Louisiana State Museum)
 - c) Cross Section through Nave (Louisiana State Museum)
 - d) Detail of Sanctuary Arch (Louisiana State Museum)
 - e) Detail of the High Altar (Louisiana State Museum)
 - f) Plan, c. 1842 (Louisiana Department, New Orleans Public Library, 219 Loyola Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana)(Photocopies for the HABS collection were made in August and October 1964.)
- The February 20, 1840, edition of The Picayune announced the first Mass in Saint Patrick's:

"Divine Service is to be performed in St. Patrick's Church, Camp Street for the first time on Sunday next. The interior is unfinished as yet, but accommodations have been prepared for the comfort of those who may attend. A collection will be taken on the occasion to aid in finishing the noble edifice."
- The work was substantially completed about 1841.
- "According to a church committee report in 1843, the plastering of the church was 'faithfully done' by Wilson and Patterson for a sum of nearly \$4000 which 'they were to have been paid as the work progressed.' Iron pillars were furnished by Jedediah Leeds whose foundry was at 86 Delord Street. Hardware was furnished by Richardson, Waterman and Wood from their store at 47 Camp Street. Another subcontractor named Simpson also furnished materials for the church, probably from the lumber yard of A. P. Simpson on Triton Walk (Howard ave.). Unfortunately funds

to pay these various claims were not available and litigation continued in the courts for several years. Eventually the church property was sold by the sheriff on April 12, 1845.

-Three murals were painted for Saint Patrick's by the French artist, Leon Pomarede (c. 1807-1892), in 1841. These large paintings behind the main altar are of:

- a) The Transfiguration (central panel)
- b) Saint Patrick Baptizing Two Irish Princesses
- c) Christ Walking on the Water.

-The exterior stucco work, although mentioned in the original specifications, was probably applied in the 1850's.

-A new pulpit was installed in 1864.

-Major renovations were undertaken in 1888-89. Parish financial reports indicate that \$3500 was spent in 1888. The Picayune on December 15, 1889, reported:

"St. Patrick's - The Grand Old Church completely renovated within and without. - And again ready for religious observations today. - The arches recalcimined, galleries retouched and furniture improved. Rich carpets and weeks of artists' work responsible for the rare transformation.

"Panels of the doors have been regained in yellow and are relieved by showy suggestions of dull brown . . . The broad and graceful arches have felt the sympathetic touch of the calciminer, and appear today as white as the driven snow . . . The interior of St. Patrick's has been transformed into one of the most imposing houses of God on the American continent . . . The outside shabbiness is gone and the massive front looks clean and trim."

At this time the floor of the end bay of each gallery over each of the side altars was removed.

-The Chancery archives indicate the following work on the church up to recent years:

"1893 - . . . Repairs to church and organ, \$800. Ornaments for altar \$1,200. Statues for church \$375. Altars \$175.

"1894 - Improvements to church \$690.55 - Paving, tinner's work, new storm doors to church.

"1896 - 600 loads of earth under church. Shillinger pavement around church. New pipes, new crib. All amounting to \$580. New presbytery. Labor, chandeliers, cash toward crib, excepting value of chandeliers, \$430. Donated iron fence, \$200. Repairs and extra paving \$200. Improvements on Church: Repairs to tower, new iron fence and paving \$2500.

"1901 - Received from insurance company for fire loss, \$3250. Improvements on Church \$5250.

"1911 - Cementing exterior and painting, \$1550. Debt: due to Mr. Delaney for cementing the church.

"1914 - Note by Father Carra: 'Improvements on church - decorating \$960. New organ \$1300 - total \$2260. The new organ was purchased during the absence of the Most Rev. Archbishop, but authorized and in the presence of Very Rev. Leo Gassler, Professor Gernhauser making the purchase for St. Patrick's Church. The organ cost \$950, and \$350 (paid) to A. Rive to take down the old and put up the new. I had a signed contract with U. deBacinetti for \$600 to decorate the church. The contractor disappeared and I had to place \$900 in the hands of the court to pay the creditors.'

"1915 - Damage to church and repairs from hurricane." ("The 1915 hurricane is said to have damaged the pinnacles of the tower and resulted in their partial removal. One of these pinnacles, crashing down through the roof, practically demolished the organ. It was then that the present organ was purchased from Trinity Episcopal church on Jackson Avenue and installed by A. Rive.")

"1923 - New Baptistry and vestment case, \$205.

"1926 - From Insurance Company, \$8910. Improvements on church \$8690, and rectory \$915." ("The Item of June 6, 1921 reported that lightning had struck the steeple at about 9 a.m. that day tearing about a wagon load of brick and mortar from the steeple and showered the yard and Camp street in front with debris." In July 1925 lightning again struck the building.)

"1921 - Expenses: Organ and clock \$1850."

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers
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